

## Anxiety: Information for Parents

### What is Anxiety?

Physical, emotional and behavioral responses to perceived danger, new situations or life challenges are normal reactions that people experience every day. These are anxiety responses and they protect us from danger. In healthy amounts anxiety can be a motivational tool that helps people do their best and learn new skills.

If anxiety lasts too long however, or is too intense it may begin to interfere with a person's life. Constantly worrying about things that are unlikely to happen, which then get in the way of friends, school and life is when anxiety becomes a problem for a child/youth.

### Signs of Anxiety

Anxiety can impact a child/youth in the following 4 ways:

- Physical (emotions felt in the body):
  - Chest pain, stomachache, nausea, dizzy, lightheaded, lump in the throat, headache, numbness or tingling, rapid heart rate, shortness of breath, sweating, trembling or shaking.
- Behavior:
  - Avoidance (not doing things or going places), difficulty raising hand, not getting routine shots or dental work, lack of social networks, trouble sleeping alone, school refusal, refusal to participate in activities
  - Dependence and reassurance seeking (asking the same questions over and over again, and seeking comfort in non threatening situations)
- Thoughts:
  - Examples include: "I'll fail my exam, my teacher will yell and everyone will laugh at me, that dog might bite me, what if I throw up at school?"
  - Extreme and excessive (worry about things in more extreme ways than their peers)
    - Having trouble falling asleep because of thoughts
    - Expecting the worst to happen, all the time.
- Functioning (daily life is severely impacted by anxiety):
  - Not sleeping
  - Trouble at school
  - Social withdrawal
  - Engaging in high risk behaviors
  - Substance use/abuse



- **Educate yourself and your child about anxiety**
  - Encourage your child to open about worry and fears
  - Teach your child/youth about anxiety
  - Help your child recognize anxiety
- **Understand that some anxiety is expected and developmentally appropriate**
- **Do not discount a child's feelings.** Learn to recognize anxiety signs and try to identify possible stressors.
- **Important to identify and get help for anxiety symptoms as early as possible.**
- **Encourage independence.** Parents of anxious children can be overprotective. It is important for your child to learn skills to cope with the world. Encourage your child to try new things, take risks, and to do things on their own. Children/teens that are given the opportunity to take charge of their environments see themselves as capable. Give your child/teen responsibilities (appropriate for their age) around the house and encourage your child/teen to pursue activities they are good at.

### Resources/References for Anxiety

- Edmonton Catholic Schools Parent Resources: <https://www.ecsd.net/ParentsStudents/ParentResources/Pages/default.aspx>
- Anxiety BC [www.anxietybc.com](http://www.anxietybc.com)
- Teen Mental Health [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org)
- MindShift: Created by AnxietyBC, Mindshift is an app designed to help teens and young adults cope with anxiety.
- Mood GYM <https://moodgym.anu.edu.au/welcome> - Mood GYM is an interactive web program that consists of five modules, an interactive game, anxiety and depression assessments, downloadable relaxation audio, a workbook and feedback assessment.
- Playing with Anxiety: Casey's Guide for Teens and Kids [www.playingwithanxiety.com](http://www.playingwithanxiety.com) – is a guide to teach kids and teens the strategies to handle the normal worries of growing as well as the more powerful tricks of anxiety.
- Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada: [www.anxietycanada.ca](http://www.anxietycanada.ca)

### Phone Numbers:

- Call Health Link Alberta: 811
- CYFAMH Intake: 780-342-2701
- Youth Addiction Services Edmonton: 780-422-7383
- Mobile Response Team: 780-427-4491
- Call 211 – Alberta Community resources
- Catholic Social Services: (780) 432-1137
- The Support Network, Edmonton Distress Line: 780-482-HELP (4357)

### How Parents can Help

As a parent, remember that you are the most important person in your child's life. Although it can be frustrating for the entire family to deal with an anxious child, your child/youth needs a loving but encouraging parent to help support her through the process of learning to cope and conquer their anxiety.